

Message

From: Hewitt, James [/O=EXCHANGELABS/OU=EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATIVE GROUP (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/CN=RECIPIENTS/CN=41B19DD598D340BB8032923D902D4BD1-HEWITT, JAM]
Sent: 2/14/2019 2:34:44 PM
To: Jackson, Ryan [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=38bc8e18791a47d88a279db2fec8bd60-Jackson, Ry]; Dunlap, David [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=591eb15a268249dda0c05a7451f765c3-Dunlap, Dav]
CC: Abboud, Michael [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=b6f5af791a1842f1adcc088cbf9ed3ce-Abboud, Mic]
Subject: RE: FOR REVIEW//comment on WSj article

They have updated their paragraph on Nancy and David:

Mr. Wheeler previously worked as a lobbyist for energy companies. Nancy Beck, a high-ranking official in the agency's chemical-safety office, previously worked at the ACC. And David Dunlap, the deputy administrator for the office that oversees IRIS, previously worked for Koch Industries.

From: Hewitt, James
Sent: Thursday, February 14, 2019 9:07 AM
To: Jackson, Ryan <jackson.ryan@epa.gov>; Dunlap, David <dunlap.david@epa.gov>
Cc: Abboud, Michael <abboud.michael@epa.gov>
Subject: FOR REVIEW//comment on WSj article

Ryan & David,

Deliberative Process / Ex. 5

EPA's Top Leaders Stymied Research Unit, Report Finds

Government watchdog's draft report says agency officials sidelined studies on chemicals' health risks

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/epas-top-leaders-stymied-research-unit-report-finds-11550149201?mod=searchresults&page=1&pos=1>

By Heidi Vogt

An Environmental Protection Agency research unit tasked with evaluating chemicals' health risks has had its work hindered by the agency's top leadership, according to a government watchdog.

The unit, known as the Integrated Risk Information System, or IRIS, is responsible for identifying dangers from chemicals in products such as paint and pesticides, and releasing assessments of their potential threats to human health.

A draft Government Accountability Office report found that "the IRIS program has been unable to release any work since June 2018 while it was waiting for feedback from the Administrator's office," according to a copy reviewed by The Wall Street Journal. The GAO is a nonpartisan federal auditing agency that provides information to Congress.

“IRIS program progress toward producing assessments was delayed by EPA leadership deliberations about priorities,” the draft said.

The findings reflect a fundamental shift in thinking at agencies like the EPA, where Trump administration officials are challenging longtime practices, particularly around the use of science, said Bernard Goldstein, a professor emeritus at the University of Pittsburgh School of Public Health who oversaw EPA scientific programs under President Reagan.

“They’ve had these standard approaches, and now the standard approaches are gone,” said Mr. Goldstein, adding that he found this development troubling.

EPA officials disputed the report’s findings and said Obama administration policies needed revision.

“The Trump EPA believes it is using the best available science to determine its proposed rules and regulations, just as the former administration believed it was doing the same thing,” agency spokesman James Hewitt said. “However, this administration clearly has huge disagreements with the way the Obama administration carried out the agency’s mission.”

The report, dated last month, said EPA leadership in October directed the heads of the agency’s various programs to limit the number of chemicals they wanted IRIS to study or continue researching. Nine of 16 assessments were then dropped, including one that looked at whether exposure to formaldehyde increases the risk of leukemia that “has been drafted and is ready to be released for public comment,” according to the GOA report.

Acting EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler told lawmakers in January that “each program was given complete latitude to select its own priorities.” Mr. Wheeler said the formaldehyde analysis was dropped because it wasn’t identified by any of the program offices as a priority. He said it could be added later should that change.

A senior EPA official said while the agency did remind its program officers in October to submit their lists of chemicals for research, it didn’t put a cap on how many they could request.

Democratic lawmakers have been demanding the release of the formaldehyde report for months.

“This study is a congressional priority, it’s a priority of career staff within the EPA, and it’s a priority of families all over the country who don’t want to be exposed to a dangerous chemical,” said Sen. Ed Markey (D., Mass.).

The issues cited by the draft report reflect a broader push by the EPA under the Trump administration to re-evaluate the agency’s handling of scientific findings, including limiting the use of certain types of outside research—a move welcomed by business groups.

The Competitive Enterprise Institute, a conservative advocacy group, issued a report this week criticizing IRIS’s assessments for sounding false alarms about chemical risks and creating “unwarranted health scares.”

Formaldehyde is used in products ranging from particleboard to disinfectants and embalming fluid. A large body of scientific research, including studies by the National Cancer Institute, backs the likelihood of a link between the chemical and leukemia, particularly among people with high levels of workplace exposure.

Industry groups such as the American Chemistry Council have disputed that idea. “There is no biologically plausible link,” said Kimberly White, senior director of chemical products and technology at the ACC.

“It appears that this process has been guided and shepherded through by political appointees that have really strong conflicts of interest on certain chemicals,” said Richard Denison, a senior scientist at Natural Resources Defense Council, an environmental advocacy group, referring to the EPA’s changed approach toward scientific research.

Mr. Wheeler previously worked as a lobbyist for energy companies. Nancy Beck, the head of the agency's chemical-safety office, previously worked at the ACC. And David Dunlap, the head of the program that oversees IRIS, previously worked for Koch Industries.

The GAO's draft report doesn't name individuals, alleging only that "EPA leadership" stymied IRIS research. James Hewitt, the EPA spokesman, rejected the assertion that those at the agency were acting in the interests of former employers.

"All EPA employees receive an ethics briefings when they start and continually work with our ethics office regarding any potential conflicts," Mr. Hewitt said.

The GAO produced its 35-page report in response to a request by Sen. Tom Carper (D., Del.), the ranking Democratic member of the Senate Environment and Public Works committee. The draft is currently being circulated inside the agency for comments before being finalized.

James Hewitt
Environmental Protection Agency
Press Secretary

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